

# Armed with New U.S. Money, NATO to Strengthen Russia Deterrence

BRUSSELS - Backed by an increase in U.S. military spending, NATO is planning its biggest build-up in eastern Europe since the Cold War to deter Russia but will reject Polish demands for permanent bases. Worried since Russia's seizure of Crimea that Moscow could rapidly invade Poland or the Baltic states, the Western military alliance wants to bolster defenses on its eastern flank without provoking the Kremlin by stationing large forces permanently. NATO defense ministers will next week begin outlining plans for



a complex web of small eastern outposts, forces on rotation, regular war games and warehoused equipment ready for a rapid response force. That force includes air, maritime and special operations units of up to 40,000 personnel. The allies are also expected to offer Moscow a renewed dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council, which has not met since 2014, about improved military transparency to avoid surprise events and misunderstandings, a senior NATO diplomat said. U.S. plans for a four-fold increase in military spending in Europe to \$3.4 billion in 2017 are central to the strategy, which has been shaped in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. (Reuters)

## Nieghbor News

### Iran, Britain to Resume Issuing Visa Soon: Zarif

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif says Iran and Britain will resume issuing visas for the two countries' citizens "within the next few weeks." Zarif made the remarks while speaking to reporters in London on Friday after an 1.5-hour meeting with Britain's Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond on the sidelines of a donor conference on Syria. "In the meeting, we agreed that the two countries start issuing visa for ordinary citizens and ordinary passports within weeks," the Iranian minister said. "We believe that this measure is a positive move for further ex-

changes between the two countries' people and we hope that it will be conducive to a better mutual understanding," he added. On August 23, 2015, the British foreign secretary attended a symbolic ceremony marking the reopening of the UK embassy in Tehran. Britain shut down its embassy in Tehran in November 2011 and withdrew its diplomatic staff after hundreds of Iranian students staged a protest outside the UK embassy in Tehran against the expansion of London sanctions on the Islamic Republic, pulling down the UK flag and demanding the expulsion of the British ambassador. (PressTV)

### Australian FM Hits Back at Critics over Syrian Aid Contribution

CANBERRA - Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has fired back at aid agencies after they criticized Australia's 18-million-U.S. dollar contribution to help the war-torn regions in Syria and Iraq. The Australian government has been lambasted by leading international aid agency Oxfam, as well as Care Australia, for its comparatively low, on a world-scale, foreign aid pledge. Australia's figure was dwarfed by the aid contributions from Germany (2.59 billion U.S. dollars by 2018), Britain

(1.66 billion U.S. dollars) and the United States (940 million U.S. dollars). The announcement from German Chancellor Angela Merkel, nominated for a Nobel peace prize last year for her humanitarian work in resettling Syrian displaced refugees, meant that Germany's donation was 150 times larger than Australia's, despite the European powerhouse only having four times Australia's population. Even Scandinavian minnow, Finland, with less than half Australia's pop ... (More on P4)...(24)

### S.Korea, U.S., Japan Hold Teleconference to Share Intelligence on DPRK Missile Launch

SEOUL - Defense authorities of South Korea, the United States and Japan on Friday held a video conference to share intelligence to prepare for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s planned launch of a long-range rocket. An unidentified South Korean military official was quoted by Yonhap news agency as saying that the three nations held a deputy department head-level video teleconference as scheduled earlier in the morning. Senior mili-

tary officials of the three allies shared intelligence relevant to the DPRK's missile launch, while assessing current situations of the pending launch of Pyongyang's long-range ballistic missile, according to the report. The intelligence-sharing contact came as the DPRK announced its plan on Tuesday to launch a long-range rocket between Feb. 8 and 25 to put an observation satellite into orbit. The announcement was made amid ongoing discussions



in UN Security Council to add new sanctions against the DPRK for its claim on Jan. 6 that it had tested the first of its hydrogen bomb. South Korea, the U.S. and Japan exchanged intelligence on the DPRK's long-range missile within the framework of the intelligence-sharing pact signed in late 2014 by the three countries, the Seoul military official said. (Xinhua)

### Syrian Army Captures Key Hub in Southern Daraa

DAMASCUS - The Syrian army captured on Friday a key hub in the southern province of Daraa, further exposing key roads and supply lines, a monitor group reported. Intense battles continued after midnight between the Syrian army and the rebels in the town of Atman in the northern outskirts of Daraa, coupled by heavy shelling on the town. A surface-to-surface missile was fired on the town, after which the Syrian army has become in full

control of the town, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The UK-based watchdog group said the town is situated on the northern gate of Daraa, and close to the rebel-held Artillery Battalion. The town is also located near the road connecting Daraa with the capital Damascus. The town also has several routes into the city of Daraa. The progress is the latest victory the Syrian army has made in Daraa, the birthplace of



the Syrian conflict. Late last month, the military forces backed by Iranian officers and fighters of the Lebanese Hezbollah Shiite group as well as Russian air cover succeeded to take full control of the key city of Sheikh Miskeen in the countryside of Daraa, following the large-scale offensive unleashed by the Syrian forces on Dec. 28 of last year. (Xinhua)

### French Gov't Proposes Prolonging State of Emergency by 4 Months: PM

PARIS - Facing "unprecedented, global and lasting terrorism threats," the French government is proposing changing the constitution to allow for easier implementation of a state of emergency and to limit its duration to four months, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said on Friday. Addressing lawmakers, Valls said the government was "ready to restrict the extension of the state of emergency to a maximum of four months, and make it renewable." Valls

defended the "effective and indispensable" state of emergency imposed in the wake of a series of shootings and suicide bombings in November 2015, where a total of 130 people were killed. "The terrorist menace is here and it will last," warned Valls, adding the proposed constitutional reforms aimed "to adapt the constitution to the reality of the terrorist threat." Imposed the first time during the Algerian war in 1955, the state of ... (More on P4)...(25)

### Tajikistan Court Removes Presidential Term Limits from Constitution

DUSHANBE - The Constitutional Court in Tajikistan has approved constitutional amendments that would allow President Emomali Rahmon to run for office as many times as he pleases, ruling that the "founder of peace and unity" should not be limited by a two-term restriction, Russia's TASS news agency reported Thursday. The honorific - which in full runs: "The founder of peace and national unity, the leader of the nation" - was bestowed on

Rahmon by parliament in December 2015, TASS reported. The Constitutional Court has now ruled that Tajikistan's constitution, which currently states the "same individual cannot serve as president for more than two consecutive terms" should be amended to include an exception: "The restrictions ... do not apply to the founder of peace and national unity, the leader of the nation," according to the report. (Agencies)

### Obama Seeks \$450 Mln Aid for Colombia

WASHINGTON - U.S. President Barack Obama will ask Congress for more than 450 million U.S. dollars in aid for Colombia's peace process, the White House said Thursday. The aid includes more than 390 million U.S. dollars in foreign assistance. The rest of the fund will help with Colombia's humanitarian efforts and counter-narcotics programs, the White House said in a statement. The announcement came as Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos visited the White House on Thursday. A peace deal is in sight between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia rebel group (FARC) after five decades of armed conflict. "After half a century of wrenching conflict, the time has come for peace," Obama said at a White House reception for Santos. "A country that was on the brink of collapse is now on the brink of peace." "Today's ... (More on P4)...(26)

### EU Negotiators Dissect but don't Demolish Draft Deal for Britain

BRUSSELS - Britain's European partners voiced reservations but no outright rejection of a draft deal to meet its demands for reformed EU membership terms on Friday when negotiators from the 28-nation bloc met for the first time to discuss the text, diplomats said. London's bid to win exemption from the European Union goal of "ever closer union", preserve its financial sector from regulation by the euro zone and curb access to in-work benefits for EU migrant workers won backing from Poland as



the meeting of national negotiators - or sherpas - began in Brussels. The powerful leader of Warsaw's new ruling party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, said after meeting British Prime Minister David Cameron that he was satisfied that the proposals would protect the rights of some 600,000 Polish workers already in Britain. Brussels set out a plan this week to deliver on ... (More on P4)...(27)

### Swaraj Leaves for Two-Day Tour of Sri Lanka

NEW DELHI - Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj Friday embarked on a two-day tour of Sri Lanka to attend a meeting of the joint commission of the two countries. "Leaving for Sri Lanka! EAM @ SushmaSwaraj departs for the 9th India-Sri Lanka Joint Commission Meeting in Colombo," Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup tweeted. The meeting of the joint commission, set up in 1992 to resolve issues of bilateral cooperation, will be co-chaired by Swaraj and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera in Colombo. The Indian External Affairs Minister is also scheduled to meet Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and former president Chandrika Kumaratunga. Swaraj will Saturday inaugurate an exhibition aimed at showcasing the rise of the computing sector and digital technologies in India. (Xinhua)

### Ukrainian Minister Hopes Resignation will Speed up Reforms

KIEV - The Ukrainian economy minister whose resignation plunged the country into yet another political crisis said on Friday he hopes it will help create momentum for economic reforms. Aivaras Abramavicius resigned on Wednesday, saying he and

his team could no longer drive forward the much-needed reforms because of resistance to their efforts from government officials. Abramavicius, a former investment banker advocated deregulation and wide-scale privatization in ... (More on P4)...(28)

### UN Report Urges end to Wikileaks Founder's "Arbitrary Detention"

GENEVA - A latest report issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention said Friday that the Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has been "arbitrarily detained" and the detention should "be brought to an end." The report, adopted on December 4 last year and made public on Friday by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, also said that Assange should be afforded the right to

compensation. The Working Group believes that Assange's stay in the Ecuadorian embassy in London "has become a state of an arbitrary deprivation of liberty," the report said. "The detention was arbitrary because he was held in isolation during the first stage of detention and because of the lack of diligence by the Swedish Prosecutor in its investigations, which ... (More on P4)...(29)

### French, German Ministers Stress Cooperation

BERLIN - The interior ministers of France and Germany have stressed Europe must urgently tackle its migration crisis to safeguard the continent's borderless Schengen area, and urged greater information-sharing among police and security services. Bernard Cazeneuve and Thomas de Maiziere spoke Friday while visiting Greece, which is on the front line of Europe's massive refugee influx. With a lengthy sea border with Turkey and thousands of kilometers of ... (More on P4)...(30)

### China Opposes Unilateral Sanctions Against DPRK: FM Spokesperson

BEIJING - China on Friday said it opposes unilateral sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), for efforts to avoid complicating the situation. "China is against any unilateral sanction in international affairs," Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said at a press briefing in response to possible U.S. sanctions against the DPRK. The U.S. House of Representatives recently proposed sanctions against countries, businesses or individuals that assist DPRK nuclear and ballistic missile programs, export luxury goods to the DPRK or engage with Pyongyang in money laundering, counterfeiting or drug trafficking. "The United Nations Security Council is discussing a resolution on the recent DPRK nu-

clear test," Lu said. "We hope parties concerned can meet each other halfway, and avoid complicating the situation." When asked whether China will take "more serious" moves against the DPRK, Lu said China's Special Representative to the Korean Peninsula affairs Wu Dawei's visit to Pyongyang was "a very serious diplomatic effort." Wu returned from Pyongyang Thursday after a three-day visit, during which he met with DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong and First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye Gwan, and held talks with Vice Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho. China's Foreign Ministry said the consultation focused on China-DPRK relations and the situation on the peninsula. (Xinhua)